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~ Gaming and Violence! ~ Yahoo Free Speech Suit ~ New iMacs Shipping!

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    * FBI Warns of Mining Accident Scam! *-
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->From the Editor's Keyboard  
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"Saying it like it is!"

Now this is the kind of winter that I can enjoy! We've been experiencing a period of January thaw, with temperatures higher than normal. The snow is almost gone, and no need to bundle up with ten layers of clothing. A friend of mine down on Cape Cod called me the other day to tell me that people were out on the golf course! I was very tempted...

Well, we just returned to our first full week of work since the holidays. Boy, early retirement is looking better and better. I dunno, maybe it's the early stages of Spring fever! Well, let's get on with another new year!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING  
compiled by Joe Mirando  
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. We've had a little touch of warm weather here in the northeast, and I fear that it's setting us up for a fall. Before too much longer, it'll be cold and and nasty again, and we'll be shivering and cursing Mother Nature for letting us get accustomed to a little above-average temperature and sunlight.

Well, I guess we'll have to make due and muddle through somehow. We've done it before and we'll do it again and, no doubt, we'll complain then too. <grin>

I see that Apple has finally let people get a look at their Intel-based Macs. As far as the reviews go, I'll wait until there are a couple thousand out there in circulation before I pay any attention. In the meantime, they'll no doubt make a change here and there. Of course, some of the stuff they'll change will be stuff that people liked... loopholes and things like that. You know, little glitches that someone will find a way to exploit to get the machines to do something they weren't intended to do... like maybe running a stock version of WinDOZE along side OS X.

No matter what cool little things I could come up with here, someone will no doubt come up with something even cooler that no one ever thought of. That's what makes the world of computers so cool.

Speaking of cool, let's see what's happening on the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup  
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Ronald Hall asks about re-directing serial ports:

"Guys, is there any software out there that will step in, take any software looking for serial port 1 and redirect it to another (faster) serial port?"

Mark Bedingfield tells Ronald:

"I think there was an app that could be used with freeze dried years ago on the Falcon. BUT it could only work up to 19,200. I can't remember what it was called tho."

Robert Schaffner adds:

"HSModem, fine for any serial port on falcon."

Ronald replies:

"Hmm, okay. I guess I should have been more specific in my first post guys. What I had in mind was the faster ports on a Mega STe. So would HSModem intercept between, say BBS software hard-coded for serial port 1, and fool that software into thinking its getting serial port 1 when its actually one of the faster ports?"

Mark tells Ronald:

"The app I mentioned could redirect. The Falcon does not have a low speed (MFP) port. So this app redirected to serial 1 (SCC). However it did not go beyond 19,200 (MFP speeds).

Hsmodem is only a serial port patch. use it in conjunction with Steno/Stalker or similar you can talk to any available port at full speed."

David Bolt jumps in and adds his thoughts:

"It all depends on the software that's writing to the serial port. If it's using the BIOS/XBIOS routines, it should be possible to alter the mapping of the serial devices so what it thinks is serial port 1 (MFP) is actually one of the faster ports on either a Falcon, a TT, or a Mega STE. In theory, it should be a very quick, and probably no more than 5 minute, SMOP[0][1]. Doesn't mean that it really will be though.

On the other hand, if it's writing straight to the MFP, bypassing the routines to gain a little extra speed, the answer is probably no.

[0] Small Matter Of Programming. The nice way of describing what to laymen should be simple job, but often turns out to be rather complex.

[1] I have an idea how this could be implemented, including a method of swapping back to the proper device layout, but no way to actually test this out[2]. My idea would be to swap the entries for the serial port 1 and the faster serial port in the Bconin\_vec, Bconout\_vec, Bconstat\_vec, and Bcostat\_vec tables. Setting a cookie, if one isn't already present, to show they've been swapped is probably a good idea as well.

[2] Both my Atari machines are in storage and not easily accessible."

Peter Schneider asks about laser printers:

"Does anyone know a recent laser printer that will work on the parallel port of an ordinary ST?

A friend of mine bought one (a HP 3xxx) and is unable to make it work, though there is no problem if hooked to a PC.

As he is living 400 miles from me, I'm unable to give him real help by the phone.

Any information concerning the HP 3000 series or about any laser printer that definitely works with ST is welcome. The capability to print graphics is indispensable because of Signum!2."

'Ziggy' tells Peter:

"I would think any HP that has a parallel port would work. All are backwards compatible with PCL5."

David Wade adds:

"I understood that some of the later HP printers were PCL6 only...."

Dr. Uwe Seimet counters:

"But PCL6 is backwards compatible to PCL5, isn't it?"

Greg Goodwin tells Uwe:

"HP printers that have PCL5 appear to work fine on Ataris, whose NVDI actually sends PCL3 and PCL4 compliant commands. (Of course, that means you need to have a parallel port.) PCL6 is not backwards compatible."

David Wade adds:

"See <http://www.csgnetwork.com/hppclhist.html>. The 3000 series

seems to support both 5 and 6 though. I wonder if they need to be set in pcl5 mode?"

Uwe tells David:

"That's interesting. Did you find any information on the available interfaces of the 3000. I found that it does not have a parallel interface but only USB, which would of course mean that you cannot use it with an Atari regardless of the PCL level."

David replies:

"Like many of the HP printers there is a slot into which an optional parallel adaptor can be plugged.

It seems a bit odd but in many situations its better to have a network interface on a printer rather than a centronics port."

Edward Baiz adds his experiences:

"My Hades has the same printer port as a ST I believe. I was able to get my wife's HP LaserJet 2100 to work. I was using NVDI 5 which has a number of other HP Laserjet drives in it. I did not try any graphics, but the text came out fine."

Ronald Hall asks for help finding software for a SuperCharger:

"I recently picked up some old Atari magazines in an auction on Ebay. The seller was nice enough to throw in some extra "goodies". This included a Supercharger by Talon Tech. I've never used one of these before. Anyone have any idea where I might acquire some software and docs for it?"

Edward Baiz tells Ronald:

"I have seen the docs on the Internet on one of the Atari sites. I wanted to get one of these, but never found one. It was a device that had a PC chip in it and allow an Atari to run PC programs or something like that. From what I remember there were two version, a 286 version and a 386 version."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - New Commodore at CES!

\*\*\*\*\* Gaming and Violence!  
Wild Arm 4 Ships!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!  
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## Wild Arms 4 Ships For Playstation 2

Brand new video game publisher XSEED Games announced today that Wild Arms 4 has shipped to retailers across North America. Exclusively for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system and developed by Japanese developer Media. Vision Entertainment Inc., Wild Arms 4 is the newest chapter in the popular role-playing game series which has shipped over 2.5 million copies worldwide. Featuring a new cast of characters, an original storyline, and a new strategic battle system, it appeals to new players of the series while fans will instantly recognize the mainstays of the Wild Arms world of Filgaia. Wild Arms 4 follows the journey of four teenagers as they reshape the future of Filgaia.

Jude Maverick has grown up in an isolated town called Ciel, which is completely enclosed in a large sphere floating thousands of feet above the surface of Filgaia. His sheltered world changes forever when he sees the sky "tear" and ships entering his homeland. Upon inspecting the campsite set up by the intruders, he sees something that he has never seen before: a girl. The girl's name is Yulie and she is being held captive by the intruders after being captured by a "Drifter" for hire, Arnaud G. Vasquez. After the invading army attacks Ciel and brings the whole sphere crashing down, Jude, Yulie and Arnaud join forces to find out the army's true intention behind Yulie's abduction. With the help of another Drifter, Raquel, these four idealistic teenagers travel the war-torn land of Filgaia in search of truth, their own identities and their individual paths to adulthood.

- \* Innovative new HEX battle system unlike anything seen before in turn-based RPGs; easily accessible while providing an amazing amount of speed, depth and strategy.
- \* Action elements on the field map such as double-jumps, using the new "Accelerator" ability to manipulate time, and equipping items to solve puzzles eliminates the boredom of walking around waiting for random battles.
- \* Inspiring coming-of-age storyline as Jude learns to cope with the harsh realities of the outside world with the help of his newfound friends.
- \* Events presented in a distinctive use of polygons and shading with voice-overs.

Wild Arms 4 is available at retailers for a suggested retail price of US\$39.99. The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) has rated Wild Arms 4 "T" for Teen.

## New Commodore Banks on Warm Memories of the '80s

Remember the Commodore 64? The boxy, brown home-computer-in-a-keyboard that sold millions in the '80s is back - if only in name.

A Dutch company, recently rebranded as Commodore International Corp., is betting that nostalgia for one of the first affordable, widely sold home computers will jump-start sales of its new line of multimedia products in the United States.

At its official coming out at last week's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Commodore unveiled a lineup of products sporting the old Commodore logo, but the resemblance stops there. The new Commodore isn't in the personal computer business.

The company's new lineup includes an affordably priced GPS navigator that also plays movies, music, and games; a multimedia set-top box that plays DVDs, records video, and streams music and other content; and a kiosk the company is marketing to retailers that will allow customers to walk up and download music, games, and ring tones to digital players and cellphones.

A company spokesman said Commodore's new strategy harkens back to the old company, a pioneer in the home computer market that created innovative products sold at affordable prices between 1981 and 1994. Best known for its Commodore 64 computer - and popular among game enthusiasts - the company went belly up in 1994, after having sold millions of units.

Yeahronimo Media Ventures purchased the brand name from another Dutch firm, Tulip Computers, in a deal worth \$32.7 million in 2004. Yeahronimo adopted the name last year.

One of Commodore's founders and current chief executive, Ben van Wijhe, worked for Tulip and along with another founder initiated the purchase of the Commodore brand.

The company, which has been selling digital music players and downloadable music in Europe, is now looking to expand in the United States.

"We want to get back to the tradition of the company providing a very large market with a very good product at a very reasonable price," said Patric Olenczak Sr., vice president of global sales.

Resurrecting a brand can be risky, said Paul Parkin, a principal with SALT Branding, a San Francisco firm. While nostalgia may initially generate interest, it may not hold up in the long run.

Older brands "have a kitsch quality," Parkin said. "They're remembered fondly by a certain segment of the population who, for good or bad, has associations with them, but often those associations are no longer relevant today."

It remains to be seen whether the company will be successful at trading on the Commodore name, but it certainly evokes warm and fuzzy feelings among former owners.

Last year, Commodore ran a test at a consumer trade show in London, purposely putting up a sparse booth emblazoned with the old Commodore logo. People flocked to the booth, bypassing other high-tech players to reminisce

about their old Commodores.

"The emotional reaction we got from people was amazing," said Sean MacGillavry, a marketing manager for Commodore. "People were skipping the Gizmondo booth, which had full bells and whistles, girls in short skirts, and a big car display. They were coming over to us going, 'My first computer was a Commodore!' "

Interest in the old company's story continues. A new book, "On the Edge: The Spectacular Rise and Fall of Commodore," was recently published.

Paul Rand, global chief of development and innovation for Ketchum, a public relations agency, said that if the new Commodore can tap into the good feelings US consumers have about the old Commodore - and please "influencers and brand evangelists" - they have a good shot at bringing back the brand.

Brands have risen from the dead, including Napster and Atari, but they may bear little resemblance to their predecessors and fail to emulate past successes. One exception Rand cites is DeWalt, a well-known power tool brand that died out in the 1980s. Acquired by Black & Decker, DeWalt eventually generated \$1 billion in revenue and a 35 percent market share, Rand said.

"It costs so much money to build a brand now," Parkin said. "You hear figures of \$250 million to launch a new brand. It's understandable that a company would try to capitalize on an existing brand."

Commodore's Los Angeles office will oversee the US expansion. The publicly held company is projecting revenue of \$20 million for fiscal 2005, \$55 million for 2006, and \$127 million for 2007.

And while Commodore may be leveraging the name, it's looking to innovate and to join companies such as Apple and Microsoft in offering both software and hardware.

Olenczak said Commodore will focus on consumer devices that multitask and connect users to media and services from anywhere.

The GPS unit, the Commodore Navigator Combo, uses Microsoft's Windows CE operating system and has a 20 GB hard drive for storing digital photos and other files, a touch-screen, a voice recorder, built-in speakers, and a memory card slot. It will retail for \$699.

### Study Claims Link Between Gaming and Real-World Violence

A new study has claimed that there might be a link between violence depicted in video games and increased aggressive real-life behavior in gamers.

In recent findings published on the New Scientist Web site, researchers at the University of Missouri-Columbia noted that study subjects who played violent video games showed diminished brain responses to images of real-life violence.

The reduction in response correlates to aggressive behavior, according to the study's authors.



For the study, the university recruited 39 experienced gamers. They then were shown images of both nonviolent and violent scenes, while their brain waves were recorded.

Subjects with the most experience in playing violent games displayed lower response rates to the violent images. These players also were discovered to be more enthusiastic about "punishing" an opponent in subsequent gameplay.

Although there has been much discussion regarding violence in games, the new study actually is one of the few academic undertakings on the subject.

A study done by the University of Illinois last year claimed that there is no evidence of a strong link between video-game violence and real-life aggression in players.

The connection between game violence and real-life violence has been debated for years, and likely will continue to be the focus of attention, said Jason Della Rocca, program director for the International Game Developers Association.

Those in the game industry have heard such arguments before, particularly after a tragedy like the school shootings in Columbine, which some attributed partly to the killers' affection for violent gameplay.

Della Rocca believes that, as violence continues to be prevalent in society, and games get even more popular, games will continue to be a source of blame.

"It's easy for people to point to games and say that they brainwash people or make them act in certain ways," he said. "But in reality, there are social pressures and family issues, and a huge range of factors that go into how people behave. Games are just an easy scapegoat."

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A-ONE's Headline News  
The Latest in Computer Technology News  
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Apple May Offer New Laptops at Macworld

For the Mac faithful this time of year is a special one: The always lively annual Macworld conference that Apple Computer Inc. and co-founder Steve Jobs host in San Francisco.

Web sites concerning all things Apple abound with rumors and speculation that swirl weeks before the event and Jobs' keynote, to be delivered on Tuesday.

This time around, analysts say their money is on a revamped line of notebook PCs that is sorely needed, more deals with media companies for a

larger mix of content on the recently announced video iPod and possibly, ut less likely, a new flash-memory-based iPod.

"Apple's laptop line desperately needs to be refreshed," said Tim Bajarin, an analyst at Creative Strategies. "In that context, I wouldn't be urprised to see a strong updated line of laptops."

Apple, whose market-leading iPod digital music player has revived the company, is in the midst of shifting to microprocessors from Intel Corp. and away from the PowerPC chip it has used for years. Apple has said it ill start selling Intel-based computers by the middle of this year.

But many analysts have said for months they expect an earlier introduction of some Macintosh models, particularly ones using the older G4 processor.

"We think the iBook, PowerBook, Mac Mini, and potentially Xserve are areas that are going to move to Intel first," said Shaw Wu, an analyst at merican Technology Research.

A new hard-disk-drive based iPod (its more recently introduced Nano and the huffle use flash-memory chips instead to store songs) is less likely, analysts said. Cupertino, California-based Apple in October rolled out the video iPod. That announcement also came with a deal with Walt Disney Co. to ell hit shows such as "Desperate Housewives" and "Lost" for download on its Tunes music store.

Apple followed up with a deal to sell some content from NBC Universal, the television network owned by General Electric Co. Analysts expect more at acworld, following the announcement of a raft of content deals at the onsumer Electronics Show, which winds down on Sunday.

"I expect new content relationship announcements," said Roger Kay, resident of technology consultancy Endpoint Technology Associates.

At the show, known as CES and the largest U.S. tech show, content took center stage for the first time and Apple's Jobs will more than likely follow up with more deals to make more video content for sale on iTunes.

At CES, actors Tom Cruise and Tom Hanks and pop star Justin Timberlake rubbed shoulders with the top executives from Yahoo Inc., Sony Corp. and Microsoft Corp.

Their appearances matched a litany of deals by Time Warner's AOL, GE's NBC Universal, Viacom's MTV at the Las Vegas convention, where media companies were once sidelined.

Apple has a minimal presence at CES and Jobs prefers to unveil his ompany's latest products - famously tightly kept secrets - at the Macworld onvention in San Francisco.

And, of course, expect a surprise from Jobs. For years now, Jobs will ppear to conclude his keynote, only then to say, "Oh, and one more thing ...."

Said analyst Bajarin, a long-time Silicon Valley watcher: "He also has something else up his sleeve that none of us have a clue about."

Apple Computer Inc. said on Tuesday that it had introduced new computers based on Intel chips, the first to result from its move to switch from IBM PowerPC chips it had used for years.

Apple Co-Founder and Chief Executive Steve Jobs told the annual Macworld trade show here that the company's new line of iMac computers would come in the same shape and sizes as the existing G5 line of iMacs, with starting prices at \$1,299.

"The new iMac is two to three times faster than the iMac G5," Jobs said in a speech introducing a range of new products.

The new Apple iMacs are based on Intel Core Duo microchips and are set to begin shipping on Tuesday, the company said.

Apple also unveiled a remote control with FM radio capabilities for its iPod music player.

The iPod Radio Remote enables users to skip tracks and adjust the volume of their iPod even when it's in a pocket or backpack and listen to FM radio stations while displaying station and song information on their iPod screen.

Apple also debuted an updated version of its photo and media software, iLife '06, which is priced at \$79.

#### FTC Launches Site to Fight Cybercrime

Responding to the rising cybercrime threat, the Federal Trade Commission on Tuesday unveiled an online tool designed to help consumers avoid becoming victims of Internet scams.

At the website, [www.onguardonline.gov](http://www.onguardonline.gov), consumers can take interactive quizzes designed to enlighten them about ID theft, phishing, spam and online-shopping scams.

If the user selects a wrong answer, the program explains why that particular misconception about Internet security can lead to trouble.

Elsewhere on the site, consumers can find detailed guidance on how to monitor their credit histories, use effective passwords and recover from identity theft.

"We're trying to make the information as accessible as possible, with tips so people can take action," said Nat Wood, the FTC's assistant director for consumer and business education.

The education push comes as the tide of cybercrime continues to rise. Special reports by USA Today have detailed how online thieves are sidestepping computer firewalls, anti-virus and anti-spyware programs to conduct elaborate scams centered around use of the Internet.

Inherently difficult to track, evidence of cybercrime nonetheless continues to mount:

\* Malicious software. During the first half of 2005, 74% of the top 50 malicious attacks contained code to steal account logons, passwords and other sensitive data, compared with 54% the previous six months, according to security firm Symantec.

\* Keystroke loggers. The number of programs designed to directly swipe logons and passwords, as a computer user types them on a keyboard, soared to about 6,191 last year, up from 3,753 in 2004, says iDefense, a division of VeriSign.

\* Hijacked online accounts. Computers in an estimated 9.9 million U.S. households that engage in online banking transactions have been infected by keystroke loggers, giving cybercrooks potential access to an estimated \$24 billion in deposits, says the tech security think tank The Sans Institute.

"The threat to a consumers' data is everywhere," says George Waller, executive vice president at computer-security firm StrikeForce Technologies. "There are worms and viruses on instant messages, web links, shared files."

Five federal agencies and 13 private organizations partnered to sponsor the OnGuard Online website. Information on the site is not copyrighted, and the FTC encourages companies and other organizations to download and widely disseminate the information.

"The increasing concern about online threats is one of the reasons we could put together such a blue-chip coalition for a program like this," says the FTC's Wood. "E-commerce is great, but we just want people to have the tools to use it safely."

#### FBI Warns of Mining Accident E-Mail Scam

The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations is warning Internet users to be on the look out for a fraudulent e-mail soliciting money for a survivor of a mine accident in West Virginia last week.

The e-mail purports to be written by a doctor at the hospital where the miner is being treated and describes the condition of the survivor and the financial assistance that is needed for a full recovery.

The accident cost the lives of 12 miners and there was just one survivor. He is still hospitalized and in partial coma, according to news reports.

Rescue attempts were heavily covered by U.S. media and the story stayed in the news spotlight for several days partly because initial reports of survivors turned out to be incorrect.

"The FBI takes these matters seriously and is working with other law enforcement and private industry partners to identify the person(s) responsible," the agency says in a statement.

"Anyone who has received an e-mail of this nature is asked to contact the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) via the Web site at [www.ic3.gov](http://www.ic3.gov)," the statement says.

The bureau also repeated its standard advice to refrain from opening or responding to unsolicited e-mails and to verify thoroughly any requests for

money or personal information received via e-mail before responding.

### Court Lets University of Texas Block Spam

The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday declined to intervene in a dispute between the University of Texas and an online dating service upset that the school blocked thousands of unsolicited e-mails.

The high court let stand a federal appeals court's ruling that UT did not violate the constitutional rights of White Buffalo Ventures when it blocked 59,000 e-mails in 2003.

White Buffalo Ventures, which operates LonghornSingles.com, said it had complied with all anti-spam laws and argued that a federal act that allows certain e-mails superseded the university's anti-spam policy.

A 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals panel ruled in August that the federal anti-spam law, CAN-SPAM, does not pre-empt the university's policy and that the policy is permissible under the First Amendment.

The Austin-based service had legally obtained the addresses from the university, but the university started blocking the e-mail messages saying White Buffalo was part of a larger spam problem that had crashed the computer system.

The university said it was also responding to complaints from students and faculty.

At the time, UT issued a cease and desist order, but White Buffalo refused to comply. So UT blocked all the e-mail messages from White Buffalo's IP address.

### High Court Refuses Date with Spammer

The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday declined to hear an appeal in the case of an online-dating service that claimed the University of Texas violated its first-amendment rights when the school blocked thousands of unsolicited e-mails sent to student accounts.

The high court upheld an August 2005 ruling by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that the university did not violate the constitutional rights of White Buffalo Ventures, an Austin, Texas-based online-dating service, when it blocked more than 50,000 unsolicited e-mails sent to the university in 2003.

The dating service initially contended that it was in compliance with federal antispam laws and that the CAN-SPAM Act not only allowed it to send e-mails to university students and faculty but also trumped the university's own antispam policy.

The appeals court ruled that CAN-SPAM does not supersede the university's policy that the policy does not violate the first-amendment rights of White Buffalo.

Throughout the case, the university maintained that it was simply responding to complaints from students and faculty when it issued a cease-and-desist order and then blocked White Buffalo's IP address after the company failed to comply with the order.

The university also claimed that White Buffalo was partially to blame for a spamming problem that had crashed the Texas institution's computer systems.

"I am pleased the court showed its wisdom in deferring to the sound legal decisions issued by the courts in favor of our client," said Attorney General Greg Abbott in a statement. "The University of Texas - and indeed every public university - should always be afforded the right to safeguard its resources by blocking a flood of unwanted e-mail spam."

The brouhaha began in 2003 after White Buffalo began sending unsolicited e-mails for its LonghornSingles.com Web site to students and faculty within the University of Texas system. The company had legally obtained the e-mail addresses after filing a Freedom of Information Act request.

The university, after receiving complaints from several students about unsolicited e-mails from the company, ordered the company to discontinue sending the e-mails. The school based its request upon its Board of Regents' general policy against solicitation. When the company refused to stop, the university blocked its IP addresses.

White Buffalo filed a lawsuit that it lost in March 2004 when U.S. District Judge Sam Sparks ruled in favor of the university. The case then went to the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans that once again ruled in the university's favor, finding that the university had not violated White Buffalo's first-amendment rights and that the federal antispy law did not preclude ISPs from filtering out spam.

Security analysts are pleased with high court's decision and say that the case was never about the supposed constitutional rights of companies that deal in spam. According to Ron O'Brien, a senior technology analyst at Sophos, it was the online dating service that violated the school's rights.

"This case is not about free speech; it's about whether an organization has the right to manage its network the way it sees fit. In that context, the Supreme Court's decision is a victory for common sense," said O'Brien.

"The University of Texas, or any organization for that matter, should not be required to pay for the storage, bandwidth, and other resource required to process bulk mail," he said. "The university owns its network and has the right to block unwanted e-mail from any source it deems inappropriate. Students at the university who really want to take advantage of White Buffalo's services have the option of subscribing to an alternative ISP or one of the many Web mail services available."

#### Microsoft, Apple Reaffirm Office's Future

Microsoft will continue to develop its Office for Mac software for at least another five years, the company's Macintosh Business Unit has announced.

The popular software will be available for Macs running either PowerPC, its current chip configuration, or the Intel-based Macs recently unveiled at

Apple's Macworld conference.

In addition to formalizing the agreement that cements Office for Mac into place for the next handful of years, Microsoft also noted that there will be enhancements to Entourage 2004 for Mac.

Also in the works is a plan to build converters that will read the new Microsoft Office Open XML formats.

Microsoft and Apple have been collaborating for the past decade after a period of intense rivalry. The recent agreement underscores Microsoft's ongoing dedication to the Mac platform, noted Tom Gibbons, a Microsoft vice president.

"We've had many years of success with Office for Mac, and this formal commitment confirms that we're in the Mac business for the long haul," he said.

Although cynics might be amused to see that "the long haul" in the technology business seems to mean "five years," Microsoft does have significant reason to stick close to Apple.

Not only is Apple enjoying a period of robust success, but the agreement ensures that, for at least the next few years, Apple will not attempt to release its own productivity suite, a product rumored to be in development.

Microsoft's announcement about its Mac Office plans likely will be just one of many, many discussions this year about the company's productivity suite, some analysts believe.

With the forthcoming release of Office 12 for Windows, Microsoft is attempting, in part, to create some favorable buzz in advance of the suite's ship date, noted Gartner analyst Steve Kleynhans.

"Microsoft is in the midst of a very complex, rather massive undertaking that could change the entire market," he said. "Undoubtedly, they have a marketing plan in place for acclimating people to the idea of new systems and software before their major launches."

The company's effort could become especially aggressive as enterprises ponder when to transition to Vista and Office 12. Gartner has predicted that many businesses will find it hard to justify upgrading during 2007 and even 2008, and that enterprises might discover migrations are more complex than they anticipate.

#### Mozilla Releases Thunderbird 1.5 E-Mail Client

Mozilla Corp. has formally released a new version of its Thunderbird e-mail client, which promises improved security features and tools designed to make the open-source product more user-friendly.

Thunderbird 1.5 includes a new phishing detector that issues an alert to users when a suspicious link appears in an e-mail message.

It also includes support for server-side spam filters used by Internet service providers, said Scott MacGregor, the lead engineer for Thunderbird at Mozilla.

Other enhancements include a spell checker, a message-autosave feature, and the ability to input and sort addresses by frequency of usage. Support for podcasts via RSS has been added as well, said MacGregor.

Basic features of the client include IMAP/POP e-mail support, a built-in RSS reader, support for HTML mail, mail-search capabilities, message filtering, message grouping, labels, return receipts, and the ability to manage multiple e-mail and newsgroup accounts.

"One of the best features of version 1.5 is automatic software upgrades as they become available," MacGregor said. "The spam control has been enhanced and we now provide a two-layer defense against phishing attacks by flagging suspicious e-mail messages for users."

Thunderbird's support for RSS allows users to receive feed updates as e-mail messages, filtering and organizing these updates as they would ordinary e-mail.

Thunderbird 1.5 also allows users to access podcasts via a dialog box that provides direct access to the associated "helper" application, such as a Web browser or audio player. p> The software, runs on Windows, Linux, and Mac OS X, reportedly has drawn some 18 million downloads since the launch of Thunderbird 1.0 in December 2004.

"We have improved the e-mail experience by protecting users' privacy, eliminating junk mail, and adding quick-search capabilities with the built-in search bar as well," MacGrgor said.

"The biggest advantage of our e-mail client is that it is open source, based on the same platform as the Firefox browser, which lets enterprise I.T. managers and others in the open-source community look at the code and create customized Thunderbird extensions for their own purposes," he said.

"We are beginning to see an evolving ecosystem built on Mozilla, with Google integrating its desktop search with the platform and other companies adding their support," he said.

The latest version of Thunderbird can be downloaded at the Mozilla Web site.

### Court Dismisses Yahoo Free Speech Suit

A federal appeals court on Thursday skirted answering whether Yahoo Inc. must pay a fine of about \$15 million to a Paris court for displaying Nazi memorabilia for sale in violation of French law.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals dismissed a federal lawsuit brought by Yahoo in California challenging the fine levied five years ago for running an auction site in which French users could buy and sell the memorabilia banned in France.

Yahoo asked the U.S. court to rule that the judgment could not be collected in the United States because it violated the company's free speech rights.

In a 99-page decision, the court left open the central question of whether U.S.-based Internet service providers are liable for damages in foreign



courts for displaying content that is unlawful overseas but protected in the United States.

The court said it was unlikely the French would ever enforce the judgment and doubted Yahoo's free speech rights under U.S. law were violated.

Yahoo's French subsidiary, yahoo.fr, complies with French law, but a judge there nonetheless ordered the Sunnyvale-based company to strip Nazi paraphernalia from the portal's main site, Yahoo.com.

Yahoo eventually banned Nazi material as it began charging users to make auction listings, saying it did not want to profit from such material. But it continued to challenge the ruling, not in France but by filing a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in San Jose over the First Amendment issue.

A district judge in 2002 ruled in favor of Yahoo, saying the American company was not liable for the judgment. That decision was set aside Thursday.

The appeals court did agree that U.S. companies, including Yahoo, could turn to federal courts when overseas judgments inhibit speech protected in the United States.

But the court came to no conclusion about what type of speech it would consider shielding, doubting the presence of any First Amendment controversy to decide in this particular case.

"We have no ruling on the underlying First Amendment issue, which made this case so interesting in the first place," said Paul Schiff Berman, who teaches cyberlaw at the University of Connecticut.

### Some Students Prefer Classes Online

Andy Steele lives just a few blocks from the campus of Black Hills State University in Spearfish, S.D., so commuting to class isn't the problem. But he doesn't like lectures much, isn't a morning person, and wants time during the day to restore motorcycles.

So Steele, a full-time senior business major, has been taking as many classes as he can from the South Dakota state system's online offerings. He gets better grades and learns more, he says, and insists he isn't missing out on the college experience.

"I still know a lot of people from my first two years living on campus, and I still meet a lot of people," he says. But now, he sets his own schedule.

At least 2.3 million people took some kind of online course in 2004, according to a recent survey by The Sloan Consortium, an online education group, and two-thirds of colleges offering "face-to-face" courses also offer online ones. But what were once two distinct types of classes are looking more and more alike - and often dipping into the same pool of students.

At some schools, online courses - originally intended for nontraditional students living far from campus - have proved surprisingly popular with on-campus students. A recent study by South Dakota's Board of Regents found 42 percent of the students enrolled in its distance-education courses

weren't so distant: they were located on campus at the university that was hosting the online course.

Numbers vary depending on the policies of particular colleges, but other schools also have students mixing and matching online and "face-to-face" credits. Motives range from lifestyle to accommodating a job schedule to getting into high-demand courses.

Washington State had about 325 on-campus undergraduates taking one or more distance courses last year. As many as 9,000 students took both distance and in-person classes at Arizona State last year.

"Business is really about providing options to their customers, and that's really what we want to do," said Sheila Aaker, extended services coordinator at Black Hills State.

Still, the trend poses something of a dilemma for universities.

They are reluctant to fill slots intended for distance students with on-campus ones who are just too lazy to get up for class. On the other hand, if they insist the online courses are just as good, it's hard to tell students they can't take them. And with the student population rising and pressing many colleges for space, they may have little choice.

In practice, the policy is often shaded. Florida State University tightened on-campus access to online courses several years ago when it discovered some on-campus students hacking into the system to register for them. Now it requires students to get an adviser's permission to take an online class.

Many schools, like Washington State and Arizona State, let individual departments and academic units decide who can take an online course. They say students with legitimate academic needs - a conflict with another class, a course they need to graduate that is full - often get permission, though they still must take some key classes in person.

In fact, the distinction between online and "face-to-face" courses is blurring rapidly. Many if not most traditional classes now use online components - message boards, chat rooms, electronic filing of papers. Students can increasingly "attend" lectures by downloading a video or a podcast.

At Arizona State, 11,000 students take fully online courses and 40,000 use the online course management system, which is used by many "traditional" classes. Administrators say the distinction between online and traditional is now so meaningless it may not even be reflected in next fall's course catalogue.

ASU's director of distance learning Marc Van Horne says students are increasingly demanding both high-tech delivery of education, and more control over their schedules. The university should do what it can to help them graduate on time, he says.

"Is that a worthwhile goal for us to pursue? I'd say 'absolutely,'" he said. "Is it strictly speaking the mission of a distance learning unit? Not really."

Then there's the question of whether students are well served by taking a course online instead of in-person. Some teachers are wary, saying showing up to class teaches discipline, and that lectures and class discussions are

an important part of learning.

But online classes aren't necessarily easier. Two-thirds of schools responding to a recent survey by The Sloan Consortium agreed that it takes more discipline for students to succeed in an online course than in a face-to-face one.

"It's a little harder to get motivated," said Washington State senior Joel Gragg, who took two classes online last year (including "the psychology of motivation"). But, he said, lectures can be overrated - he was still able to meet with the professor in person when he had questions - and class discussions are actually better online than in a college classroom, with a diverse group exchanging thoughtful postings.

"There's young people, there's old people, there's moms, professional people," he said. "You really learn a lot more."

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